The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

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TOMB GUARDIAN PAIR FROM TANG DYNASTY ACQUIRED BY CMA

CLEVELAND — Director Katharine Lee Reid announced today that 12 works of art have been acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) as approved by the Board of Trustees earlier this week. Among them are two major Chinese Tang dynasty sculptures, a *Pair of Tomb Guardians* dating from the late 7th to early 8th century. Part beast and partly human and fierce in expression, these ceramic sculptures were funerary furnishings in a royal tomb and protected the deceased from evil spirits. This is the museum's first acquisition of a tomb guardian pair.

These sculptures and other newly acquired works, including photographs by Edward Weston (1886–1958) and Henri Cartier-Bresson (born 1908); lithographs by the German artist Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943); a pair of Alemannic fibulae (garment clasps, 6th–7th century); and a drawing by American artist Myron Stout (1908–1987) will be exhibited in the recent acquisitions space beginning the week of Dec. 11 for about three months.

CMA director Katharine Lee Reid described the current set of acquisitions: "This group of fine works of art from Eastern and Western traditions shows what extraordinary quality is available on the market in a range of artistic periods. This is how we keep making a great collection greater."

The pair of *zhenmoushou*, or tomb guardians, features bold splashes of color and an ample coverage of blue glaze. Known as *sancai* ware, this particular type of ceramic has, in addition to its blue color, a three-color glaze of amber, green, and white. One guardian has an animal head, like a snarling wolf, while flaming spikes surround the body. The other lion-like figure possesses a human face, with huge, glaring eyes and jaws tightened in anger.

"Visually speaking, these sculptures are truly magnificent," explains Ju-hsi Chou, CMA's curator of Chinese art. "It is not uncommon to hear viewers gasping when they first see them. The acquisition of this pair will place the museum in an enviable position of having the finest *sancai* sculptures outside of China."

During the late 1920s to mid-1930s, pioneering photographer Edward Weston made his most famous photographs, including close-up studies of shells, vegetables, and portions

of the human body. CMA has acquired a rare print made during this period of intense creativity — the *Study of David Alberto's Left Hand* (about 1930). Dramatically lighted, the fingers of the noted musician and composer's hand are shown in a totem-like position, representing artistic creativity, its will and discipline, and the universality of the understanding of aesthetic values. Reid notes, "This photograph, the only known print from the negative, is one of the best works by one of the masters of photography, a unique image of the hand of a musician by this artist famous for his shells and peppers."

Supplementing the museum's collection of Henri Cartier-Bresson photographs is *Calle Cuauhtemoctzin, Mexico City* (1934), an important early example of photojournalism. Discarding bourgeois conventions and proprieties, Cartier-Bresson embraced the gritty realm of abandoned buildings, poor neighborhoods, and brothels, photographing his subject matter with a sympathetic attitude free of sentimentality. This photograph of a prostitute captures the open sensuality of her face and body language as she unabashedly confronts the camera lens. The cracked, old paint on the doorway where the young woman waits starkly contrasts with the satin texture of her skin.

Oskar Schlemmer, a contemporary of early 20th-century avant-garde artists El Lissitzky, László Moholy-Nagy, and Kurt Schwitters, created *Play with Heads (Spiel mit Köpfen)* in 1923. His most important prints, the series of six color lithographs, title page, and portfolio cover, are extremely rare (there are only three other known sets). Unlike his colleagues who were investigating abstraction, Schlemmer was intensely interested in the human form. Variations on a theme, *Play with Heads* illustrates a diverse arrangement of three heads. The artist, using a technique where ink is spattered onto the lithographic stone, printed each image in a different single color. The images are composed of simple geometric elements. Schlemmer's figures are dispassionate, schematic renderings portraying the prototype for a purified, timeless image of man rather than a specific individual. This is CMA's first acquisition of a work by this important German modernist.

The well-preserved, matched pair of fibulae — objects that functioned somewhat like modern safety pins — are a rare find in today's art market, and will augment the museum's Migration Period holdings. The art of the Germanic tribes that moved through Western Europe from the 3rd to the 7th century (in the so-called "barbarian invasions") was almost exclusively one of personal adornment — a portable art that followed men and women to their graves. Since buttons were not used in antiquity, fibulae were needed to keep a cloak or garment closed and in place. These fibulae are made of cast silver, which were then chased and engraved with abstract forms, a meandering "dot and vine" pattern, and gilded. The design of this pair is typical of fibulae associated with women's graves.

Myron Stout, a noted practitioner of 20th-century abstract art, produced his first important paintings and drawings in the early 1950s, including the charcoal drawing *Untitled.* Executed on off-white paper, the

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work depicts a four-sided, uneven polygon in white against a black background. It enhances the museum's presentation of the development of abstraction in the second half of the 20th century, complementing works by Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Barnett Newman, and Louise Bourgeois.

In addition to these purchases, CMA acquisitions include the gift of the unique ceramic bowl *Cocktails and Cigarettes* (1931) from Elizabeth Mather McMillan, now on view in the major exhibition **Viktor Schreckengost and 20th-Century Design** (through Feb. 4, 2001). Designed by Viktor Schreckengost, the piece is the only one of its kind. Featuring a brilliant Egyptian blue glaze, it is similar to CMA's *Jazz Bowl* (1930) also on view in the exhibition. Another newly acquired work, *Blue Revel* (1931), was given by the artist's nephew, Vik Schreckengost. His largest and most ambitious oil painting, it explores African-American culture and music.

Other Works Entering the Collection

- *Eight Views of the Xiao and Xiang Rivers*, a rare handscroll on silk by Japanese painter Kano Tanyū (1602–1674), was given by Mrs. Daniel Verne in honor of Sherman E. and Ruth Lee. Tanyū is regarded as the most influential Japanese painter of the 17th century.
- *Six Oxen Team with Their Driver* (about 1853), by French photographer Olympe Aguado (1827–1894), is the first work by the artist to enter the collection. It enhances the museum's collection of early French photography.
- *Rouen Railway Station* (1937), by French portrait and commercial photographer Albert Rudomine (1892–1975), is a significant addition to the museum's collection of European photography between the two World Wars.

For more information about the CMA and its events, call **1-888-CMA-0033** or visit **www.clevelandart.org**.

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